



Federal Update for Sept. 28 – Oct. 2, 2015



VA Announces \$12.8 Million in funding to Help the Homeless

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald today announced \$12.8 million in renewal funding through the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program to 20 community agencies that currently provide transitional housing with supportive services for homeless Veterans under the Transition in Place (TIP) model.

As a key component of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) plan to eliminate homelessness among Veterans, VA's GPD program provides per diem payments to help public and nonprofit organizations establish and operate supportive housing for specific homeless Veteran populations, which includes the innovative TIP approach to assist homeless Veterans transition from homelessness. TIP encourages rapid movement from transitional housing to permanent housing which enables Veterans to live as independently, as possible, while increasing housing stabilization.

Today's awards follows an announcement last week of \$4 million in renewal funding through the GPD program to 21 community agencies that currently provide enhanced services for homeless Veterans with special needs.

More information about VA's homeless programs is available at www.va.gov/homeless. Community organizations seeking details and/or more information, may contact the National Grant and Per Diem Program office at <http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/GPD.asp> or by calling 1-877-332-0334.

VA Announces Expansion of Veterans Economic Communities Initiative

COSTA MESA, CA – The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) today announced the expansion of a program aimed at increasing education and employment opportunities to America's Veterans to an additional 25 new communities. The Veterans Economic Communities Initiative (VECI) brings together local and national partners to coordinate services for Veterans, Servicemembers and military families.

Announcement of the expanded communities was made in Costa Mesa by senior VA officials to more than 500 leaders from the business, nonprofit, philanthropic and local government communities who are attending VA's two-day inaugural VECI Policy Academy, which began September 29. The Policy Academy serves as a forum for local, regional and national partner organizations to engage in honest dialog about Veteran economic issues; receive interactive training on national philanthropic and community-based best practices; and hear from leaders in the field about emerging data, trends and opportunities.

"History has shown that when you give Veterans an opportunity to succeed, they go above and beyond. And we as a nation owe them those opportunities to succeed," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. "There is a tremendous amount of goodwill from the American people towards Veterans; they want to help. Through public-private partnerships like those formed and harnessed by VA's Economic Communities Initiative, we will now be able to provide better networks and tools to Veterans in 50 communities nationwide."

Secretary McDonald launched the VECI campaign in May 2015 to promote local collaboration, dialog and partnership among organizations that serve transitioning Servicemembers, Veterans and their families. VECI is part of Secretary McDonald's department-wide transformation called MyVA, which is dedicated to putting Veterans at the center of everything VA does and enhancing strategic partnerships to extend VA's reach of services.

"We have made great strides in how Veterans and their families are being supported at the local and national level through the first 25 communities that launched this incredible initiative," said Rosye Cloud, Senior Advisor for Veteran Employment during the opening session of the Policy Academy. "It is because of the success of the partnerships formed through VECI that we are able to double the program from 25 to 50 communities participating. And we are excited that this announcement was made at our first-ever VECI Policy Academy."

As part of the VECI initiative, a VA economic liaison in each community will expand and encourage collaboration among private and public organizations that offer resources related to Veteran education, training and employment. Through strategic partnerships, and by offering Veterans innovative forms of learning and employment opportunities, these communities will help Veterans gain competitive career skills and knowledge in locally in-demand fields.

Campaign partners include the Departments of Defense and Labor, the Small Business Administration, and regional and national nonprofits, businesses and educators. All VECI communities were selected based on the size of transitioning Servicemember and Post-9/11 Veteran populations; unemployment, employment opportunity and job growth; and education spending.

The full list of VECI communities is provided below. New communities being launched in early 2016 are denoted with an asterisk, and do not yet have an economic liaison assigned to their location:

Atlanta, GA	Clarksville, TN*	El Paso, TX	Las Vegas, NV	Norfolk, VA	Sacramento, CA*
Augusta, GA	Cleveland, OH*	Fayetteville, NC*	Los Angeles, CA	Oklahoma City, OK*	San Antonio, TX
Austin, TX*	Colorado Springs, CO	Fort Walton Beach, FL	Louisville, KY	Orlando, FL*	San Diego, CA
Baltimore, MD*	Columbia, SC*	Honolulu, HI	Memphis, TN*	Philadelphia, PA*	San Francisco, CA*
Boise, ID*	Columbus, OH*	Houston, TX	Miami, FL	Phoenix, AZ	Seattle, WA
Boston, MA*	Dallas, TX	Indianapolis, IN*	Milwaukee, WI*	Pittsburgh, PA*	St. Louis, MO
Buffalo, NY	Denver, CO*	Jacksonville, FL	Minneapolis, MN*	Portland, OR*	Tampa, FL*
Charlotte, NC*	Detroit, MI*	Kansas City, MO	Nashville, TN	Richmond, VA	Washington, DC
Chicago, IL	Cincinnati, OH	Killeen, TX*	New York, NY	Riverside, CA	

Under the Veterans Economic Communities Initiative, communities will develop scalable, sustainable models in the next two years that will include:

- Developing ongoing public-private partnerships focused on employment and economic opportunities;
- Fostering employer networking and encouraging hiring commitments on the Veterans Employment Center™ (www.ebenefits.va.gov/jobs);
- Supporting events such as career fairs, job and employment summits, and roundtables to boost economic competitiveness for Veterans;
- Sharing best practices and training and supporting employers who are considering hiring Veterans; and

- Facilitating the development of learning or resource hubs to help connect Veterans to economic opportunities including entrepreneurship, credentialing and skills building.

Preservation Successes at Antietam

by Donnie La Curan in Veteran News

During ceremonies today at Antietam National Battlefield, Deputy Secretary of the Interior Michael Connor joined the Civil War Trust to announce the preservation of 44 historic acres at the battlefield's epicenter.

"This land is exceptionally important to the story of Antietam," said Connor. "It is rare to preserve a property of such historic significance, and I applaud the hard work of organizations like the Civil War Trust who help make sure we can continue sharing our country's history with future generations." Deputy Secretary Connor was joined by Civil War Trust President James Lighthizer and Antietam National Battlefield Superintendent Susan Trail.

Protection of this parcel was the result of a national fundraising campaign undertaken by the Civil War Trust. The property was sold to the Trust by Lilli Wilson, whose husband and father-in-law served in the U.S. Army. The tract is surrounded by iconic Antietam landmarks such as the Cornfield and Dunker Church. Thousands of soldiers charged across the triangular parcel during six hours of morning combat on September 17, 1862.

The Civil War Trust is also engaged in fundraising to preserve two other historic properties near the Wilson tract: a 1.2-acre parcel near the North Woods and six acres near the East Woods. The Save Historic Antietam Foundation (SHAF) and the Civil War Trust will handle land restoration. Plans include removing the non-historic fence line and a modern barn, as well as replanting 3.5 acres of the East Woods.

"As with all our major preservation projects, we rely on our members and partners like SHAF to see this effort through to a successful conclusion," noted Lighthizer. "Their unwavering commitment to the Trust's mission is something that continues to inspire me." Ultimately, the land will be transferred to the NPS.

"These 44 acres at the epicenter of Antietam battlefield will be an incredible addition to the park," said Trail. "Our visitors will gain a much clearer picture of the morning phase of the battle, and, I hope, take away greater reverence for the men who fought here."

The Civil War Trust, America's premier nonprofit battlefield preservation organization, has preserved 41,000 acres of battlefield land in 21 states to date, including 299 acres at Antietam. SOURCE Civil War Trust